



## AIDS awareness marches carry the torch through the streets of San Nicolas

The Women's Club of Aruba and the UNAIDS Aruba committee conducted their annual march for AIDS awareness on Thursday, December 1, official World AIDS Day. This year's international slogan is "Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise," though individual countries have added their own campaigns, such as in England where the theme is about wearing the Red Ribbon, as a sign of support for people living with HIV and a symbol of hope for the future. The public is encouraged to "**Wise up and Wear it.**"

Aruba's marchers also carried the banner from last year's theme, a reminder of the group that has been hardest hit by this epidemic "Women, Girls, HIV and AIDS"

Lead by Women's Club President Bernadette Schouten, and political leaders the group wending their way through the streets of San Nicolas lead by the Aruba Scouts drum corps was a compendium of concerned citizens from all walks of life. The Aruba Junior Parliament joined actual members of Parliament as they made their way from the Santa Tericita Church to the San Nicolas YMCA.

According to UNAIDS estimates, there are 38 million adults and 2.3 million children living with HIV, and during 2005 some 4.9 million people became newly infected with the virus. Around half of all people who become infected with HIV do so before they are 25 and are killed by AIDS before they are 35.

Started in 1988, World AIDS Day is not just about raising money, but also about increasing awareness, education and fighting prejudice. World AIDS Day is important in reminding people that HIV has not gone away, and that there are many things still to be done. In June 2001, the world's governments met at the United Nations and promised to reverse the AIDS epidemic, but not all their promises have been kept. Hence, this year's theme, "Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise." This theme is however not specific to World AIDS Day alone but to the work the WAC (World AIDS Campaign) does throughout the year. It will also remain the focus until 2010.

Dr. Peter Piot, the Executive Director of UNAIDS published an international statement on the state of the AIDS epidemic today. He began "On this 18<sup>th</sup> World Aids Day, the world faces a choice on the global response to AIDS. We can either continue to accept that global efforts will fail to keep pace with ever increasing numbers of HIV infections or AIDS related deaths, including more and more women and girls. Or we can recognize the exceptional global threat posed by AIDS and accept an equally exceptional response." The remainder of Dr. Piot's International AIDS Day address can be viewed at [http://www.unaids.org/NetTools/Misc/DocInfo.aspx?LANG=en&href=http://gva-doc-owl/WEBcontent/Documents/pub/Media/Speeches02/SP\\_Piot\\_WAD2005\\_1Dec2005\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/NetTools/Misc/DocInfo.aspx?LANG=en&href=http://gva-doc-owl/WEBcontent/Documents/pub/Media/Speeches02/SP_Piot_WAD2005_1Dec2005_en.pdf)

The Women's Club of Aruba has long been pioneers on the island in HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns, and continued to do so with this year's awareness walk.